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SUBJECT: FRF - security concerns, but high hopes for international facilitation of Goma process

REF: Kinshasa 186

1. Summary. International facilitators met FRF leadership February 26 in South Kivu's High Plains. FRF complained about FARDC harassment of civilians and demanded investigation of FARDC human rights abuses. They asked MONUC to deploy in several villages, agreed to detail a FRF liaison officer to the South Kivu Brigade Commander's office in Bukavu and agreed in principle to submit names for the Technical Commission. Like other armed groups, they have high expectations of MONUC and other facilitators: to provide security, protect the population, help rebuild trust between the parties, and convince the government to consult with others before issuing a second decree. End Summary.

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In the middle of nowhere  
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2. (SBU) International facilitators (MONUC, U.S., EU, Belgium) and leaders of the Banyamulenge dissident group FRF held a productive 90-minute meeting February 26 in Kanambo, an isolated village in the mountains east of Minembwe about an hour by helicopter from Bukavu. MONUC's South Kivu Brigade Commander General Salawat and SRSG Chief of Staff John Almstrom headed the international delegation. Its two principal leaders, Colonel Venant Bisogo (president) and General (formerly Major) Michel Rukunda (chief of staff), headed the FRF group; political secretary Zebede Gasore acted as chief spokesman.

3. (SBU) The MONUC helicopter transporting the international group landed on a small plateau jointly guarded by heavily-armed MONUC peacekeepers and FRF fighters. The isolation of these small villages and the difficulty in deploying troops there was immediately apparent: there were no roads, merely well-traveled paths circling and running over the mountains.

4. (SBU) The group met sitting in a circle on the grass near the landing site. Bisogo, dressed in an ill-fitting suit and a black suede cowboy hat, delivered an opening statement in Swahili, but quickly handed speaking duties to Gasore. Gasore presented FRF concerns, at times consulting his delegation of a dozen or so members largely composed of soldiers in black rubber boots sporting a variety of uniforms (FARDC, FAC, possibly GSSP and a mishmash of others), equipped with radios and both light and heavy machine guns.

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FRF concerns  
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5. (SBU) Gasore, speaking intently and referring to notes and a copy of the Acte d'Engagement, which he referred to as his "Bible," expressed concerns in three areas: the presidential "Amani" decree, continued lack of security and FARDC human rights violations.

6. (SBU) Gasore cited FRF unhappiness that the decree limited Steering Committee membership to the government. He complained that the government "wants to steer everything." The FRF had expected a Committee that included the other signatories to the Acte, i.e. civil society and international facilitators. "How can we be guided," he asked, "by a government with which we have so many problems?" He insisted the government "should take things seriously," and not issue a second decree without consulting with the other signatories.

7. (SBU) Gasore's second concern was security. The recent incident at the brasserie center in Kamina (reftel) was "an example" of what the FRF stressed during the Kivus conference: there were "extremists in the government and FARDC." FRF was ready to start the integration process, but could not accept brasserie under current conditions. He said it needed security guarantees -- specifically, amnesty -- because the government "doesn't live up to its commitments."

8. (SBU) Finally, Gasore called on MONUC to deploy forces to Moramvia and Minembwe, where he said FARDC soldiers had committed serious human rights abuses. MONUC deployment was FRF's clear preference, although as alternatives Gasore proposed reducing FARDC numbers in the area, or deploying Congolese police in place of the army.

9. (SBU) Salawat urged FRF to provide specifics about alleged abuses, and agreed to look into further MONUC deployment on the High Plains. He cautioned that the Brigade could not be stretched too

thin and had to reserve troops for more serious needs (i.e., the FDLR). FRF agreed to Salawat's suggestion to detail a representative to Bukavu as liaison with the South Kivu Brigade, and committed to having that person picked up by MONUC helicopters February 29.

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Technical Commission members  
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¶10. (SBU) International facilitators pressed FRF to provide a list of its nominations for the Technical Commission. Gasore argued that it should not do so in light of the arbitrary and unhelpful Amani decree. Facilitators were firm that if the FRF wanted to move forward there should be no preconditions. The FRF agreed in principle to provide a list, but left unresolved whether it would do so without having first seen the draft of a follow-up decree.

¶11. (SBU) The meeting was hastily concluded due to the need for the helicopter to leave the High Plains before the arrival of an incoming storm.

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Comment  
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¶11. (SBU) Like other armed groups which signed the Actes, the FRF foresees an extremely active role for MONUC and other international facilitators: to provide security, protect the population, and work on building trust between parties that are afraid of each other. A second decree issued by the government without consultation with these groups could further block an already difficult process. End comment

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